

# Alankar

*Ornaments of the Tribes*

*Gopa Chakrabarti*



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**Anthropological Survey of India**

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Banjara woman with her ornaments

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## FOREWORD

Human being, since the prehistoric period have expressed their love and passion for self-adornment by various means. While the hunting and gathering Negrito tribes of Andaman Islands, who are still pursuing the ancient culture, adorn their bodies with clay, flower, shells, leaves and many such other items, the tribes in the mainland of India, living in close contact with the non-tribal population, decorate themselves with several types of ornaments made either by themselves or by their neighbouring communities. The raw materials, craftsmanship, technology artistic skill, which give the ultimate shape to an ornament, depict the finer aspects of culture of the members of a society. The Anthropological Survey of India has taken a programme to bring out a series of Coffee Table Book as a part of its documentation programme. The present work entitled *Alankar : Ornaments of the Tribes* written by Dr (Mrs) Gopa Chakrabarti, is an appreciable documentation of the necklaces used by the tribes, the latter's aesthetic sense and creative excellence, besides their nature of interdependence with both the tribes and non-tribes, living in diverse situation in India. I hope this small but informative publication would draw the attention of both the scholars and general readers.

**J K Sarkar**

Director-in-Charge


Anthropological Survey of India

28.05.2003



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## Introduction

The innate passion for love and beauty might have inspired the early man for decorative self-adornment. The genesis of using ornament can perhaps be traced back to the prehistoric period. The colourful flowers, foliage, charming wings of insects, feathers of birds, glittering stones and other such earthly objects in their immediate environments might have inspired them to use such resources for beautification of parts of their body. Even the faunal materials like the bones, teeth, claws, shells of different size and colours were used for the same purpose. Some of these ornaments were also used to drive away evil spirits supposedly encircling them. With very simple technology of joining or threading the different objects by barks, twigs they used to prepare varied types of ornaments to adorn themselves. These artistic assemblages also carried an aesthetic touch in such adoration. The continuity of self-adornment can be observed through the several proto historical and historical archaeological findings of statuettes, images and of the temple architectures. Even the Vedic literatures, epics, mythological stories have described the various stylistic ornaments used by both the men and women of those periods. In course of time, the continuity of the age-old practice of making ornaments have reached it's zenith through the introduction of new technology, skill and use of different raw materials to make various ornaments of stylistic patterns, motifs and designs.

The tribes of India in general are very fond of wearing ornaments. Both the male and the female wear ornaments that vary according to the availability of the raw materials in their immediate ecological environment. The motifs, design and style of making ornaments also depend on their socio-cultural and religious background. Neck ornament has a special importance to them. It conveys certain symbolic representations of social and magico-religious significances.

Some neck ornaments bear especial status and are used on particular occasion. For example, the Angamis and the Ao Nagas of Nagaland, use wooden or metal pendants or necklaces with human head motif as a symbol of head hunting status. The Rabari women of Gujarat, desirous of having children, use necklaces of silver or gold plaques with the engravings of mythological creatures. Trimani, a necklace of gold beads threaded on a black cord, is the marriage symbol of Kinnauris of Himachal Pradesh. The Kuravans of Tamil Nadu use Kurathi, a neck ornament consisting of a pendant encased in tiger claws to gain the strength of tiger.

The multiple variation in designs and motifs of the neck ornaments signify the ethnic identity of the particular tribe. For example, Halaqaband, a typical neckband used by the Kashmiri women. It is made of white metal or silver bands designed with geometric or floral motifs. These bands are joined together by welding and two ends are tied with coloured string. The gold and silver pendants, embossed with turquoise, coral, amber or imitation stones are also very popular among them. The knee length Kachong, a typical coin necklace is the pride of the Kinnauris women of Himachal Pradesh. A unique three strands silver alloy necklace Galapatta, is very popular among the Pangi women of Himachal Pradesh.

The wide range of neck ornaments of the tribes cover a variety of materials like jungle seeds, bark, jute, cane, grass, cotton, leaves, clay, wood, glass beads, bones, teeth, claws, beaks, shells and also the precious stones, white metal, silver, brass, gold metals, etc. Very simple technology is applied to arrange those items in certain definite order to make unique designs and motifs that varies from simple dot to line, geometric and floral designs. The perforated glass beads, shells, cowries and seeds are simply threaded to a cord or fiber to make neck ornament. The complicated designs, representing the anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and mythological figurines and embossing stones on the metals are done by soldering. They usually follow *cire-perdue* or lost wax method of metal casting to make metal ornaments.

Generally the tribal people make their own ornaments. Now a days they procure coloured glass beads, cotton, jute thread, shells from the local market and make neck ornaments by threading or designing those objects as per their own choice. The local goldsmith or metal smiths also prepare some neck ornaments of metal or metal alloys and engrave motifs or emboss on stones as per the desire and requirement of their tribal customers. Some especial types of neck ornament are very common to them such as coin necklaces, solid metal neckband, threaded metal sticks, beads, chains or wire of metal alloys, engraved pendants, coloured glass bead necklaces, cowries tusks, teeth and shell necklaces or cotton or bark cords, etc.

The wide varieties of necklaces of the tribes portary a vast range of creativity of the simple people with their indigenous technology that bears definite aesthetic touch. The skill and the excellence shown by these people reflect their definite contribution in building up the multiplex culture of the tribe of this country.

## Wild seed necklace

Stringing the dried wild seeds to bark fibre or cotton thread, or utilizing the fibres of the plants, jungle leaves or grass to make necklaces might have prehistoric origin. It is still found among the Cholanayakans of Kerala; Jarawa, Onge, Andamanese, Shompens of Andaman and Nicobar Island, Juangs of Orissa.



Living in the midst of nature, the Cholanayakans adorn themselves with the objects procured from their immediate ecological environment. They make this necklace from wild fruit seeds. The dried seeds are threaded to a bark fiber string to make 20 inches long bead necklace. Both the men and women wear this necklace.

Wild seed necklace  
Cholanayakan, Kerala



## Clay necklace

The making of clay necklaces is regarded as the archaic traditional craft of ancient India. Still it is very popular among some of the tribes of India, like the Juangs, Omaniayas of Orissa. The clay beads of various shapes are prepared and for threading, a perforation is made at the centre by inserting stick. Then they bake those beads and string together in an orderly sequence to make beautiful necklaces. The clay is regarded as the sacred material associated with the mother cult.

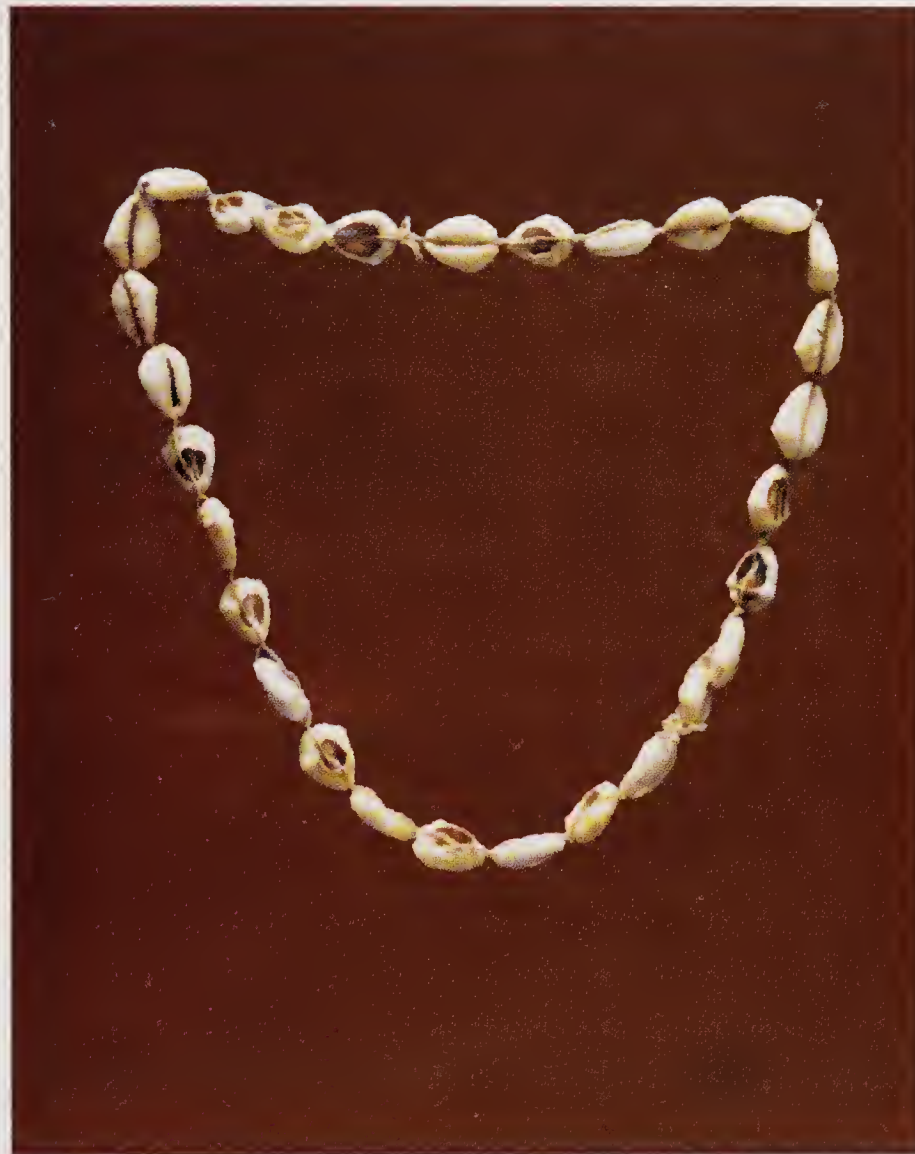


Clay girdle  
Juang, Orissa

This is a very rare piece of three strands clay bead girdle used by the Juangs in the early 1930ths. Long clay strands are prepared inserting fine wood sticks along the centres of those strands. Then fine grooving are made on those strands as per the required size of the beads and baked in the oven. When those are fully baked, the inside sticks are transformed into ashes leaving a hole. Small beads are acquired by breaking the strands at the grooving points and polishing by iron knife. These clay beads are threaded to jute fiber to make the girdle.

## Cowrie necklace

The cowrie necklaces are very common among the Jarawas, Sentinelese of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Murias, Marias of Chattisgarh, Rabaris, Banjaras of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Various types of cowrie neckbands and necklaces, studded with glass or metal beads are the usual neck ornaments of the Zemi Nagas and Sema Nagas of the Cachar mountains and of Nagaland respectively.



This beautiful necklace is made of cowries. Tiny holes are drilled at the upper end of the cowrie through which the cord is inserted to make this necklace. They procure the cowries from the local market, traded from Andhra Pradesh or Orissa. Both the male and the female wear this ornament.

Cowrie necklace  
Muria, Chhattisgarh



## Shell necklace

Tiny dentalium shell necklace, *Khorache*, is the popular neck ornament of the Onge, Jarawa and Andamanese tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The several Naga groups of Nagaland and the Kukis of Manipur procure varieties of shells traded from southern India, West Bengal and Orissa. They make various necklaces either by stringing the shells directly or by giving artistic touch to those shells with geometric and anthropomorphic figures by pokerwork, i.e. making tiny perforation with sharp needle and colouring it with the fume of burning vegetable shoots. Heavy conch shell necklaces studded with glass beads or shell sticks are very much popular among the Nagas of Nagaland, Khamtis, Sherdukpen, Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh. The seashells are regarded as the symbol of fertility.



This gorgeous necklace is made of reddish orange glass beads. The centrally placed oval shell pendant is designed with an abstract human figure, done by pokerwork. The necklace symbolizes the status of the head hunter.

Shell necklace  
Nagas, Nagaland



Shell necklace  
Nocte, Arunachal Pradesh

The Noctes are very fond of wearing tiny shell necklaces. This necklace is simply prepared by threading the tiny shells in an orderly sequence. They procure the shells from the local market.



Conch shell neck ornament  
Angami Naga, Nagaland

This unique piece of necklace is designed with rows of red, black and yellow stone and glass beads interwoven with sticks of polished shells and bone spacers. Three large conch shells are joined to support the necklace at the back of neck. This necklace is associated with the beliefs of fertility.

## Claws, tusks and teeth necklace

Various faunal materials like the teeth, claws, beaks, bones and tusks are used by the tribes as locket, pendant or as the joining parts of the necklaces. These materials are supposed to have certain powers. These are generally used as amulets.



This beautifully designed necklace is made of boar's tusk, cane and bark thread. Two pairs of boar's tusks are arranged in two rows and are fastened with cane stripes and bark thread. A bark cord is inserted through the hook of the upper row for fastening.

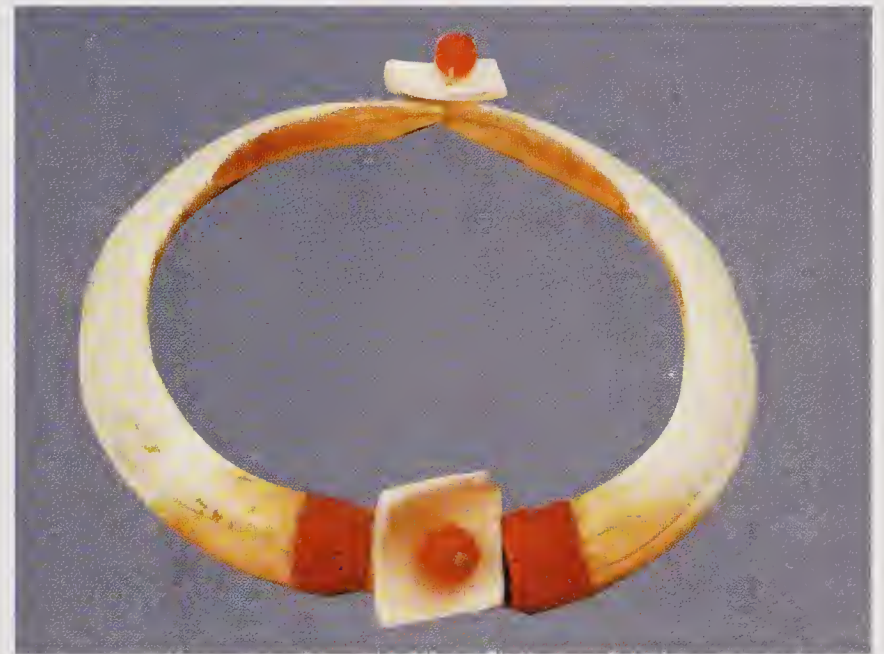
Boar tusk necklace  
Banjara, Rajasthan





Boar tusk necklace  
Angami Naga, Nagaland

This attractive necklace is comprised of boar tusk and brass metal. Three boar tusks are joined together with brass wire and cotton thread and are attached with two brass spirals at both the ends. A coiled brass strand joins both the ends of the necklace. The local Sonar community prepare this necklace.



Boar tusk necklet  
Ao Naga, Nagaland

A pair of boar tusks are joined to make this beautiful necklet. Both the joining ends are decorated with cane work and are provided with two pieces of cut shells. Only the warriors have the right to wear this necklet.



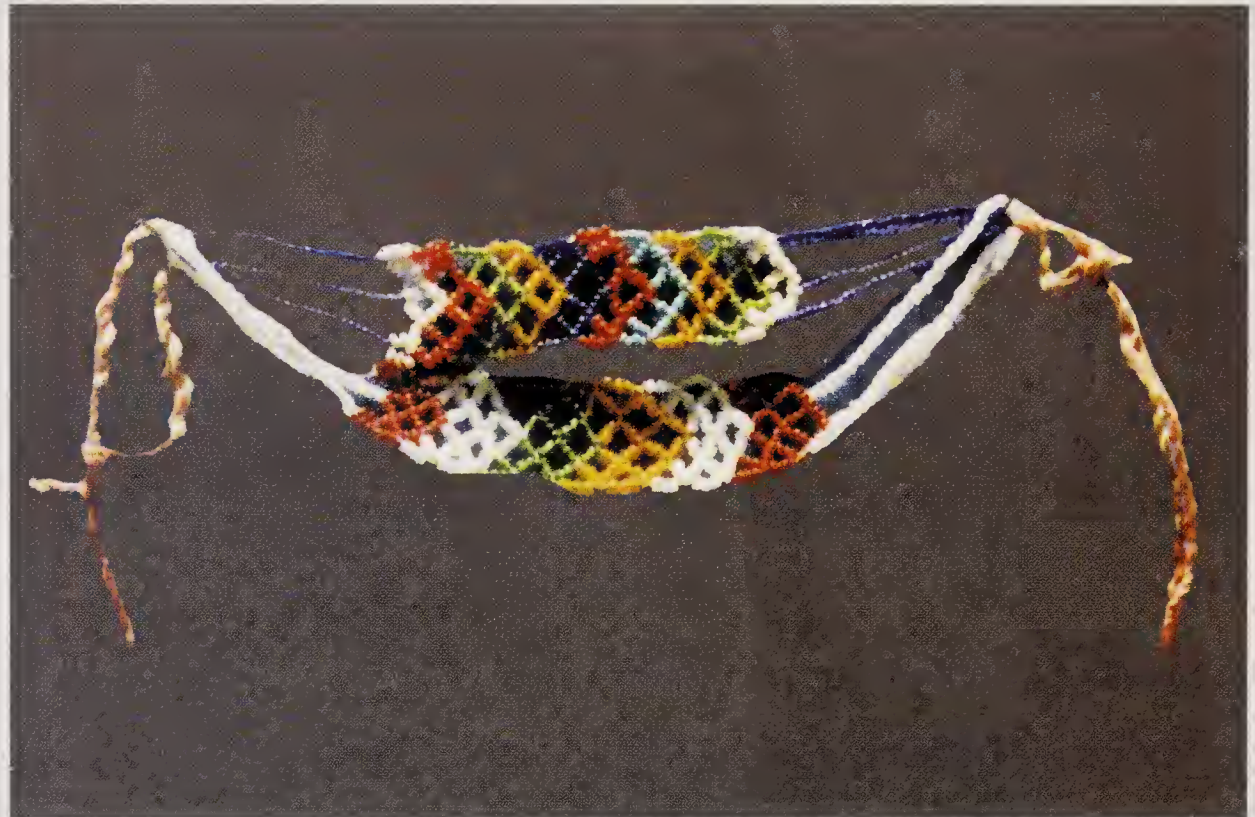
Tiger's teeth necklace  
Konyak Naga, Nagaland

The Nagas of Nagaland believe that the teeth of the tiger are associated with fertility. This stylish necklace consists of a chain of blue and green glass beads. The central part is provided with three pairs of tiger's teeth encased in brass cases. Two brass spirals are fixed at the two ends of the central part. The metal attachments are prepared by *cire perdue* or the lost wax process of metal casting and then by soldering. They procure the beads from the local market.



## Glass bead necklace

The tribes are very fond of bright colours. They prepare varieties of necklaces out of bright coloured glass and stone beads. The colour composition and the orderly arrangement of the tiny beads prove their artistic and aesthetic sense. Some of these necklaces are the *Gudiakula*, *Mathumala*, etc. The glass bead necklaces are very common among the Nagas of Nagaland; Kukis of Manipur, Murias, Marias of Chhattisgarh; Baigas of Rajasthan; Lepchas of North Bengal and Sikkim, etc. Each colour has some symbolic significance, as red represents the blood, a symbol of the fierce, blue signifies the sky, white and black signify the day and the night, yellow or golden colour signifies the sun.



*Mathumala*  
Mathuvan, Kerala

*Mathumala* is an aesthetic creation of the Mathuvan tribe of Kerala. White, red, green and yellow tiny glass beads are threaded in parallel diamond designs like a strap. The two ends are provided with blue and white bead strands for fastening knots. Both the men and women use this necklace.

This attractive glass bead necklace is the pride of the Paniyas. The green, red and the golden glass beads are interwoven in a very stylistic way. The green and red beads are threaded to make several diamond shaped pieces interlocked with white beads. Each such piece is again decorated with three golden beads to make the necklace more attractive and colourful. They procure the beads from the local market and make necklaces as per their own artistic imagination.



Glass bead necklace  
Paniya, Kerala





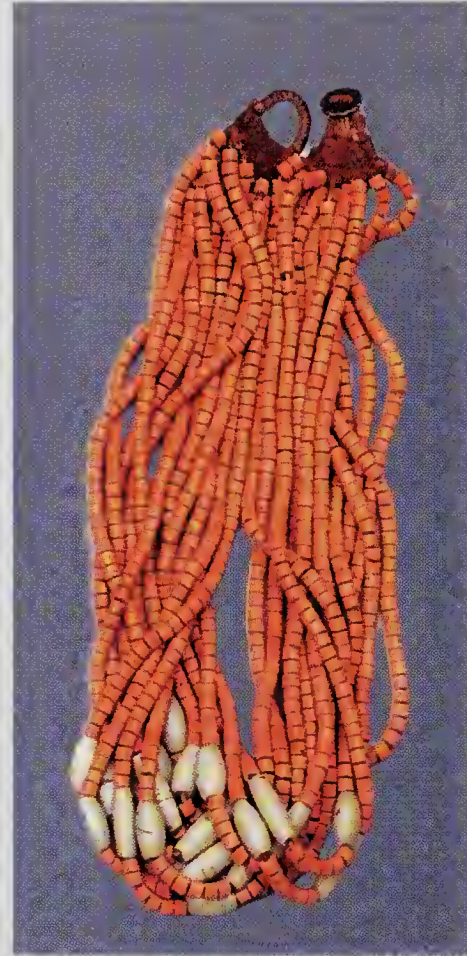
*Gasani*  
Bhil, Madhya Pradesh

The coloured glass beads are popular materials used for crafting necklaces. These are very much popular among the Bhils. They procure beads from local market. The intricate workmanship of threading white and blue glass beads to jute fiber, in alternative order gives this ornament an attractive appearance.



Glass bead necklace  
Paniya, Kerala

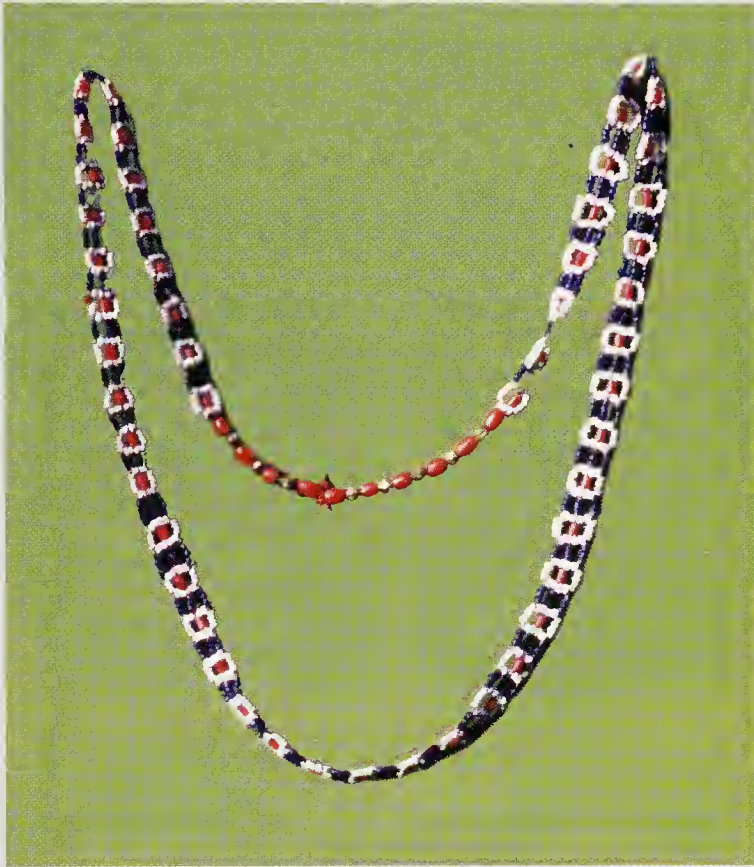
The artistic creativeness of the Paniyas is expressed best through this necklace. They procure the coloured glass beads from the local market. Three strings of red, green and yellow glass beads in alternate sequence are interwoven with a ring of white glass beads, which convey the aesthetic sense and the skilled craftsmanship of the Paniyas. Both the ends of the necklace are tied with strings of black glass beads for fastening.



Bead necklace  
Wanchoo, Arunachal Pradesh

Wanchoos are very fond of colourful stone bead necklaces. This necklace is prepared by threading orange coloured stone beads and shell beads in several rows. The fastening ends are secured with fine cane work.





Motimala  
Muria, Chhattisgarh

Motimala is the popular glass bead necklace used by both the men and women Murias of Chhattisgarh. The tiny blue, red and white glass beads are arranged in a style that represents a symbolic floral design. The red beads are encircled with white beads and are interwoven with blue beads to an intricate stylistic pattern. The whole material is so nicely threaded as to form a necklace that shows the artistic impulse of the Murias.

The glass beads and coins are unique combination of neck ornament like the Mala of the Murias. They purchase the coloured beads from the local markets and the Sonars or the goldsmiths prepare the metal coins. The blue hexagonal glass beads are threaded with small white metal coins in an alternative sequence in two rows to give an elegant look to it.



Mala  
Muria, Chhattisgarh



## Metal necklace

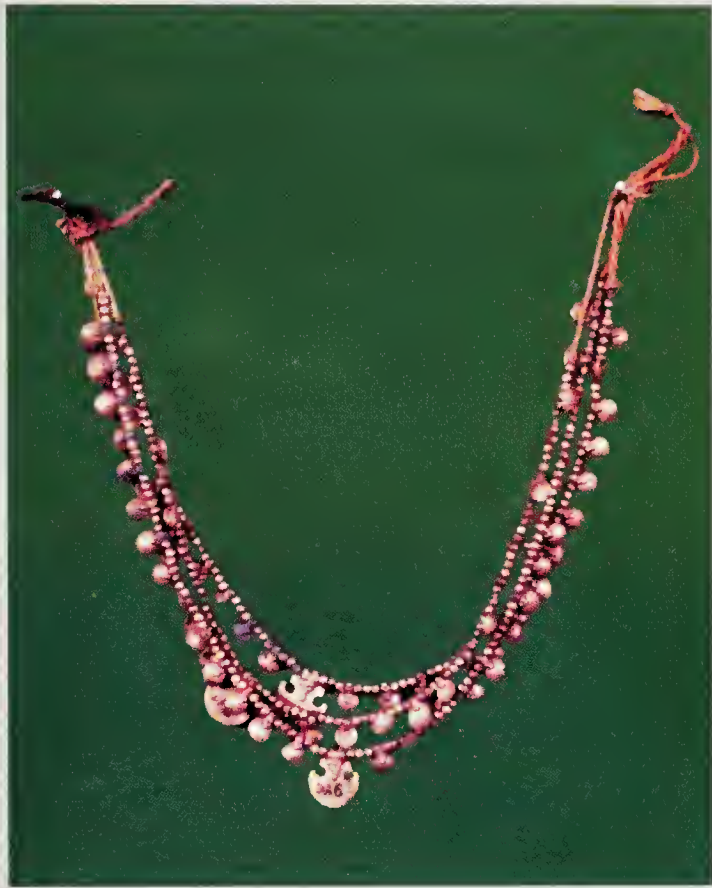
Metal necklaces are of great value to the tribal communities. The local smiths with their finer workmanship produce various types of necklaces out of different metals and metal alloys for the tribal customers as per their desire. The designs, motifs and the styles of the ornaments vary according to the socio-cultural need of the tribes, living in different eco-cultural environment. Metal necklaces are normally the chains, solid neckbands, stringed sticks or beads, coins, engraved plaques, pendants etc. Sometimes coloured glass pieces and stones of various colours are embossed on the plaques, lockets of the necklaces to make it more attractive and gracious in look. Generally copper, brass, silver, zinc and other metal alloys are used in making these necklaces.

Various types of solid metal neckbands or collars, viz., *Hansuli*, *Hansdi*, *Suta*, etc., are used by the Adis of Arnuachal Pradesh, Bondos of Orissa, Bhils, Rabari, Rathwas of Rajasthan and also by some other tribes. Normally these neck ornaments are made of *cire-perdue* or lost-wax method of metal casting. Sometimes these solid neckbands are enriched with circular, linear, spiral and with other geometric designs. Both the ends of the collars are provided with beautifully designed sockets to fit the neck that serve as lockets.

Most of the tribes of India are very fond of coin necklaces. Coin is the symbol of wealth and prosperity. Very common coin necklaces are *Putrid-Hamel*, *Bowel*, *Sakh*, etc. These necklaces are made of copper, silver, brass and white metal coins. Generally the coins are either directly threaded to a cord of bark or jute fiber or orderly arranged with glass, stone or shell beads. Sometimes these coins are fixed with other decorative pieces. The coin necklaces are common to the Marias, Murias, Bhatras and Baigas of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh; Riang, Mog and Rankhol of Tripura; Lepchas of Sikkim; Wanchos, Adis, Miris, Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh; Santhals, Munda and Oraons of West Bengal and Jharkhand respectively. Presently they procure this ornament from the metal smith or directly from the market.



A pleasant looking Saora maiden of Orissa adorns herself with beautifully designed white metal neck ornaments.



*Sangriti*  
Lanjhia Saora, Orissa

*Sangriti* is an exclusively designed brass necklace of the Saoras. This cute necklace is designed with small halves of brass beads intertwined with tiny full beads of brass and is threaded in three rows. Each row is provided with a crescent shaped locket with engraved geometric designs. The local goldsmith makes it for the Lanjhia Saora women.



Copper necklace  
Lambadi, Andhra Pradesh

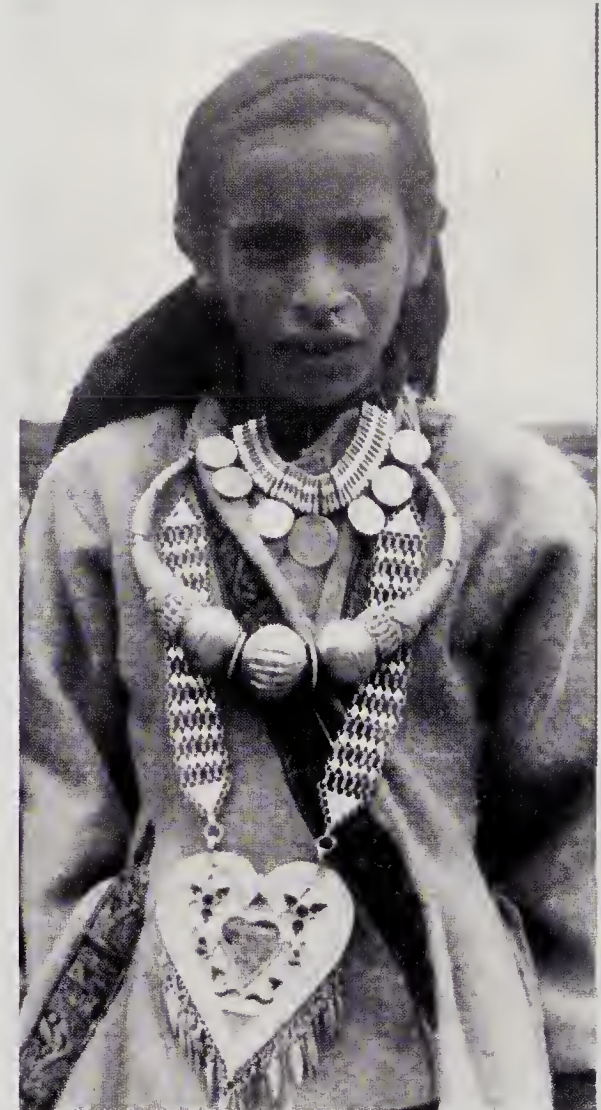
This beautiful necklace is made by intermittently coiling copper stripes round a black cotton band. A rectangular copper interlock with engraved geometric design is fitted to it to give the shape of a locket. The local goldsmith prepares this necklace as per the desire of the Lambadi women.





Sakal Bansda  
Kotwalia, Gujarat

This is a popular necklace of the women Kotwalias of Gujarat. The necklace is provided with nine coins and a heart shaped locket beautified with dotted design and jingling bells. These are fastened together with a metal chain in a regular order. They procure it from the local Sonar community.



A charming Juansari girl of Uttarakhand adorns herself with exotic white metal necklaces.



*Minigiakikaruri*  
Juansari, Uttarakhand

It is a very popular neckband used by the Juansari women. Five rows of hexagonal silver alloy beads are strung with oval red glass beads in an alternative sequence. Both ends of the neckbands are provided with decorative triangular metal pieces to tie the cords for fastening.





*Kanthi*  
Juansari, Uttaranchal

*Kanthi* is an embellished necklace of the Juansari women. It is created by the local goldsmith. Several solid silver sticks engraved with diamond and ring designs are arranged in a row and are strung side by side very closely with a strong thread. The outer rim of the row is fitted with six silver coins to make the necklace that gives it an exuberant appearance.

*Sute* is a simple and solid neckband of white metal cast by the *cire perdue* method of metal casting. There is a lock system at the centre portion. This is decorated with coil and spiral design. The necklace is prepared by the metal smith for their Muria customers.



*Sute*  
Muria, Chhattisgarh





Copper necklace  
Jatapu, Andhra Pradesh

This delightfully aesthetic piece of copper necklace is the pride of the Jatapu women of Andhra Pradesh. It is made through the *cire perdue* method of metal casting by the local goldsmith. This necklace is designed with spindle, disc, bar and barrel shaped copper pieces threaded to a cord. The centre peice is provided with a bunch of key like copper pieces tied with a ring to express an extraordinary outward show.

*Dongra* is an exclusive piece of brass girdle used by the Saora women. The Soni or the goldsmith community make this ornament. Small drum shaped solid brass pieces embossed with the relief work of fish-bone design to signify a zoomorphic motif that make it gorgeous. Each piece is made by metal casting in a mould and then chiseling gives the designs. Each such piece is provided with three loops through which a jute thread is inserted to secure those brass pieces. Two ends of the girdle are joined to a brass ring. Usually it is used in festive occasion.



*Dongra*  
Lanjhia Saora, Orissa



Coin necklace  
Adiya, Kerala

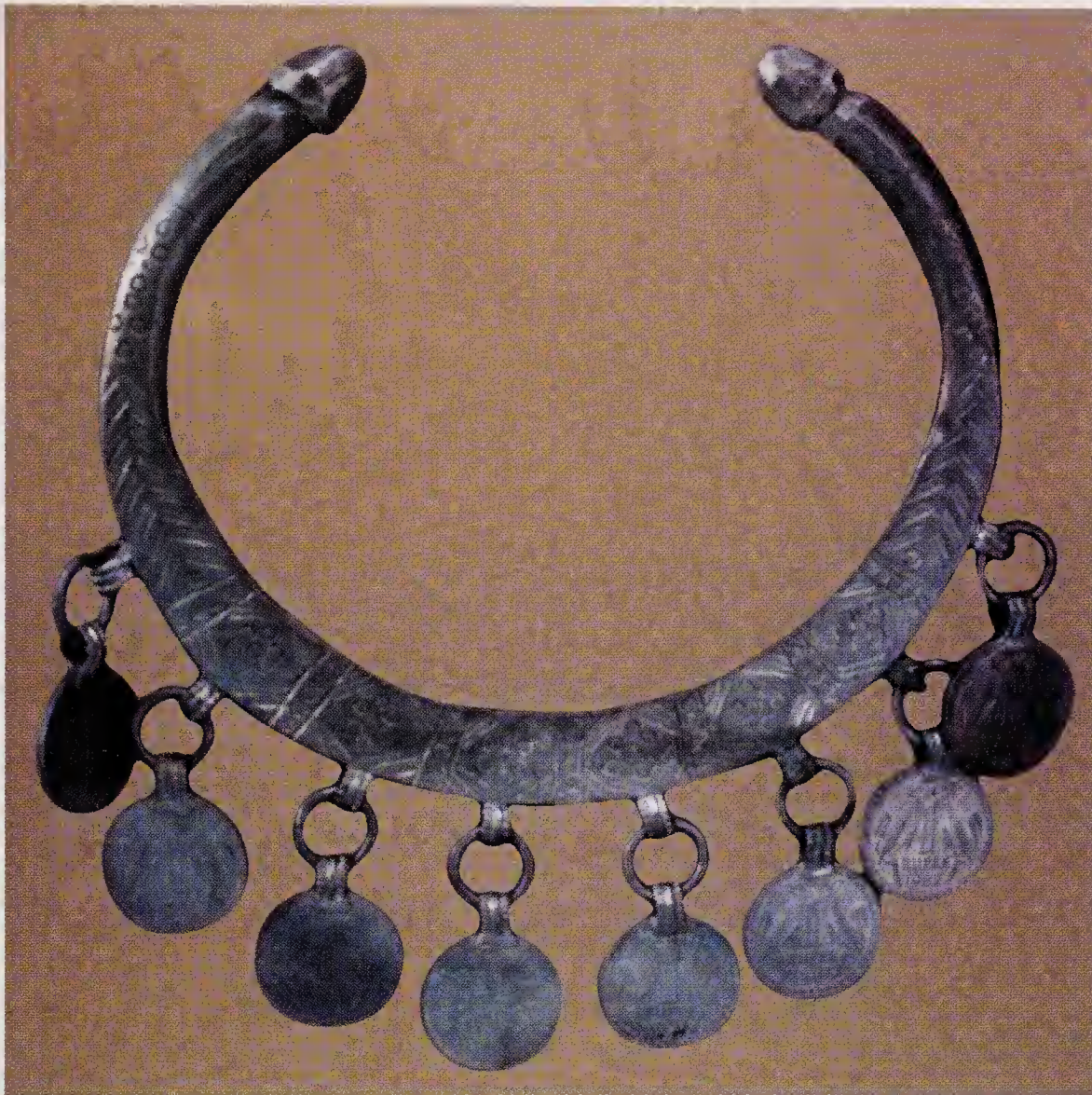
The Adiyas of Kerala love to adorn themselves with colourful glass bead necklaces threaded with brass or white metal coins. This necklace is made of tiny brown and black glass beads interwoven with six brass coins to add an attractive colour composition to the necklace. They procure the ornament from the local goldsmith.





Copper coin necklace  
Lambadi, Andhra Pradesh

This excellent copper necklace is harmoniously decorated with twelve pieces of copper coins and a number of copper bars. A circular central locket is embossed with intricate floral designs. Its gracious appearance expresses the aesthetic sense of the Lambadis who procure it from the local goldsmith.



*Hansuli* is a crescent shaped solid silver alloy choker of the Vasva Bhil of Gujarat. The broader central part is incised with diamond shaped geometric design crisscrossed by vertical lines. The narrower ends are engraved with circular and fish bone designs. Both the free ends of the choker are narrower than the central part and are provided with knobs. The outer rim of the central part is ornamented with eight pieces of coins. The Soni community creates this gracious ornament.

*Hansuli*  
Vasva Bhil, Gujarat

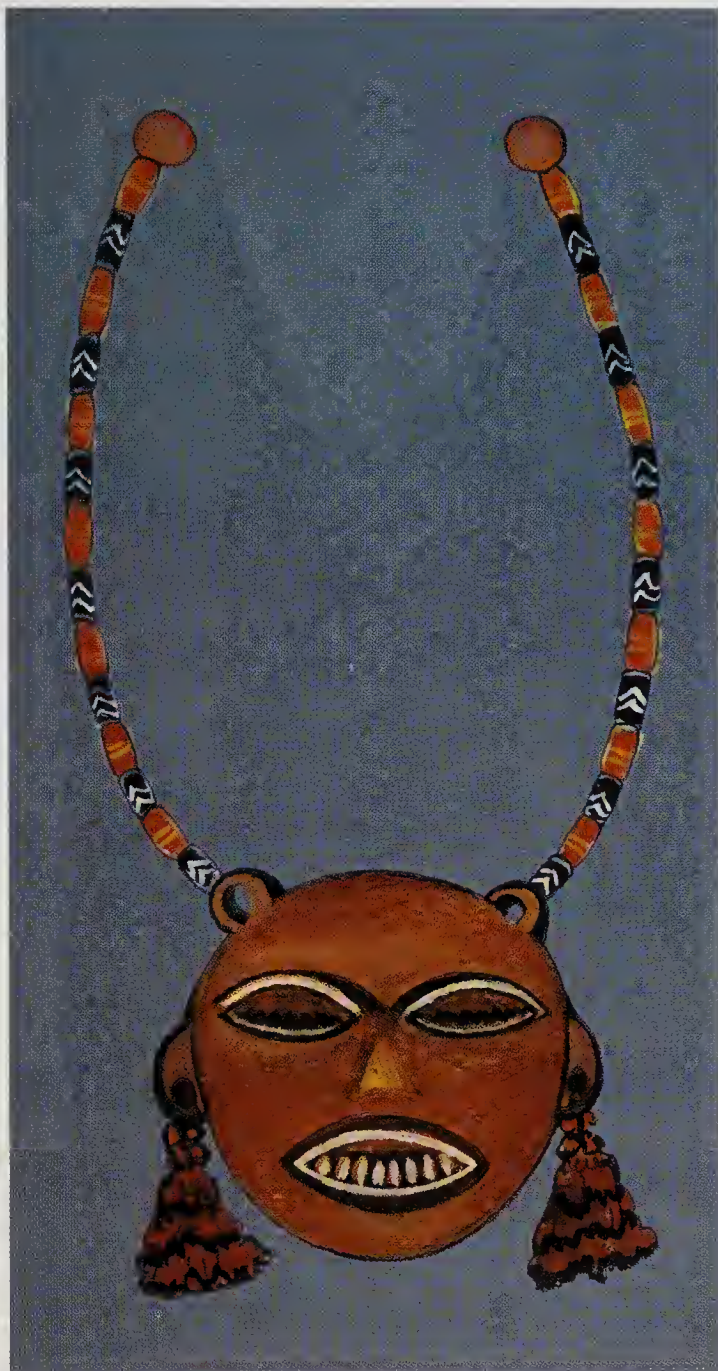




Silver neckband  
Toda, Tamil Nadu

It is made of heavy chunky silver. It looks like solid neckband with a wider central part that gradually narrows down towards the two ends. The central part is designed with a solid oval spiral piece encased in two conical spiral cases. The solid band portion is engraved with floral and dot motifs. The local Sonar community prepares it.





Metal pendant  
Konyak Naga, Nagaland

This exotic neck ornament expresses the symbolic cultural value of the Konyak Nagas. The brass head pendant symbolizes the head hunting status. The facial portion shows the expression of a dead person with closed eyes, open mouth and exposed teeth. The ears are ornamented with bunches of red and black dyed animal hair. The pendant is fastened with a string of black and orange glass beads.



*Mala*  
Juansari, Uttaranchal

It is one of the very stylistic and beautiful necklaces used by the Juansari women. Small balls of white metal designed with horizontal ridges are threaded to a thick cotton cord to make this 30 inches long necklace. The centre locket is drum shaped. Its intricate geometric design provides an exotic appearance to it. They procure this necklace from the local goldsmith.



*Duldo* is a pretty silver necklace and is the pride of the Gujar women. It consists of two rows of small sized silver balls and a centrally placed rectangular locket with coil and geometric designs. The necklace is prepared by the local gold smith.

*Duldo*  
Gujar, Kashmir





*Sakal*  
Kotwalia, Gujarat

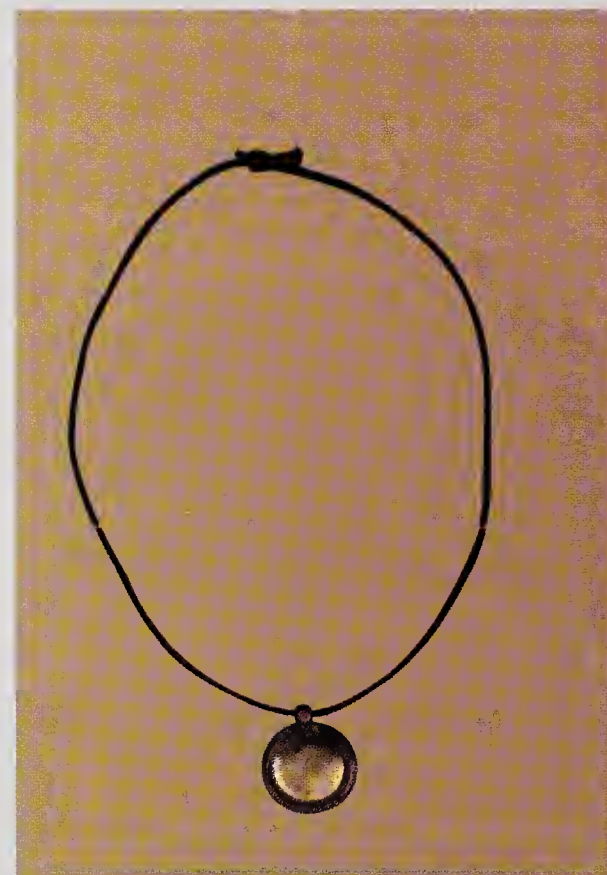
This is a typical necklace used by the Kotwalia women. It is a steel chain and its outer rim is provided with tiny bells while the inner rim is decorated with dotted design. The heart shaped locket is designed with floral motif. They purchase the necklace from the local market.





*Madariya*  
Kachhi Rabari, Gujarat

*Madariya* is the symbol of marital engagement of the Kachhi Rabari women. This artistic necklace expresses the aesthetic sense and skilled craftsmanship of the local smith. Eight brass balls and six drum shaped brass pieces are secured to a bark cord. The centrally placed brass locket is ornamented with geometric and dot designs to make the necklace more attractive.



Copper pendant  
Jatapu, Andhra Pradesh

The pendant is made of a disc of copper alloy, encased in a serrated copper ring that is tied with a black cotton thread. Both the male and female Jatapus use it.

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